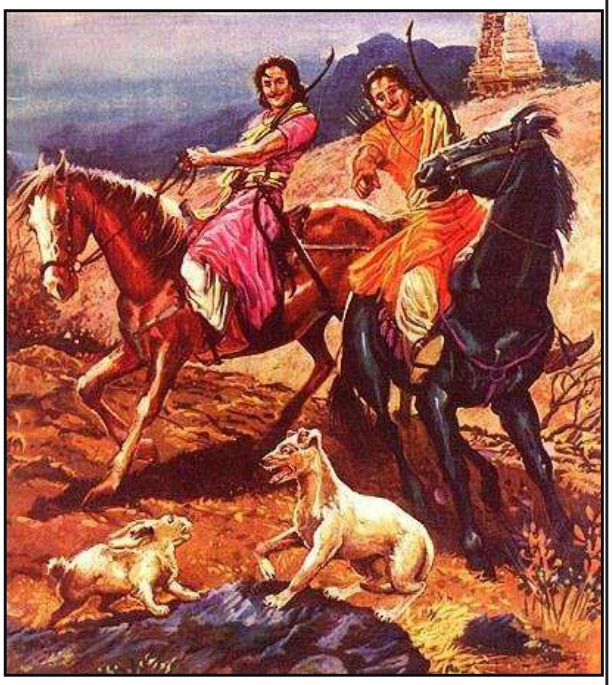
Unit 1: The Vijayanagara Empire

Resource Booklet

5.11 The Vijayanagara Empire - Origin, Location, and Discovery

For more than 200 years, the Vijayanagara empire dominated the politics and culture of medieval south India. The Vijayanagara empire was formed in 1336 CE, by Harihara I and Bukka Raya. They established their newly created kingdom along the Tungabhadra River in the Deccan plateau region and called their fortified capital, Vijayanagara or "City of Victory." Hence Vijayangara was both the name of the empire, and the capital city. Nowadays, the city is referred to as Hampi.



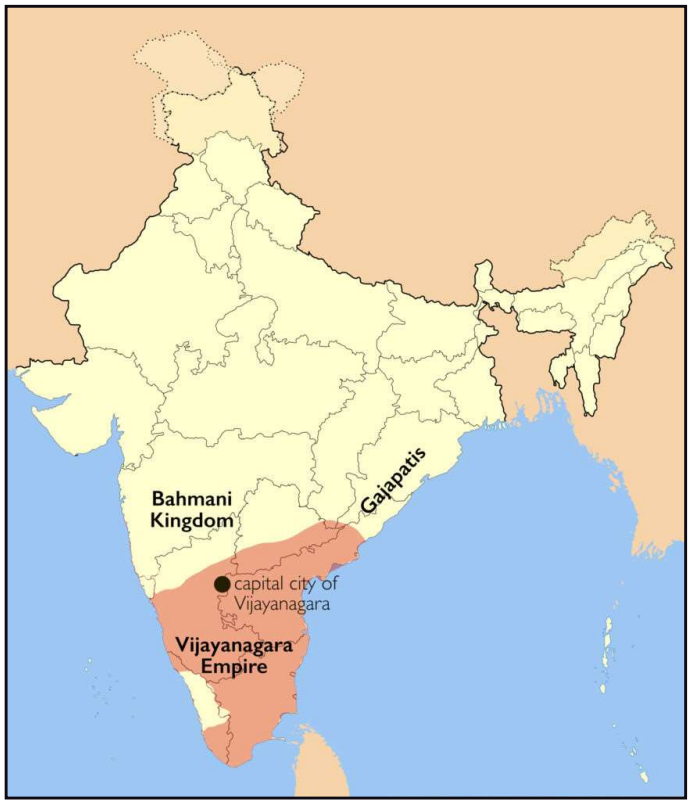
Above: *A modern drawing of Harihara and Bukka Raya, the founders of the Vijayanagara empire, deciding where to establish their capital city.*

Using their diplomatic and military skills, Vijayanagara kings protected their kingdom against invasions from their northern neighbors—the Bahmani Muslim sultanates and Gajapati Hindu rulers—enabling them to reign over much of southern India. The Vijayangara empire used regional governors (nakayas) to control the vast territories they controlled.

Despite the fact that the capital city of Vijayanagara was located inland, the kings encouraged overseas trade. They treated merchants respectfully and tried to attract trade, both local and international. The Kings monopolized control over the trade of warfare items such as war animals (horses and elephants) as well as weapons.

Fortify - to make a place more able to resist attack, especially by building high walls

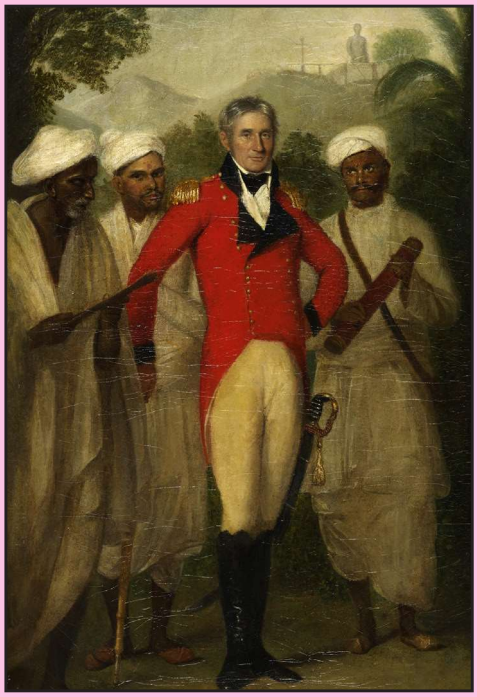
At its peak the Vijayanagara empire stretched from the river Krishna in the north to the extreme south of the peninsula. In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted after the empire's defeat at the Battle of Talikota. Although it fell into ruin, it lived on in the memories of people living in the area who remembered it as Hampi, a name derived from that of the local mother goddess, Pampadevi. These oral traditions combined with archaeological finds, monuments and inscriptions and other records helped scholars to rediscover the Vijayanagara Empire.



Right: *A map showing the extent of the Vijaynagara empire at its peak. The Gajapatis can be seen to the north east and the Bahmani Kingdom can be seen to the north.*

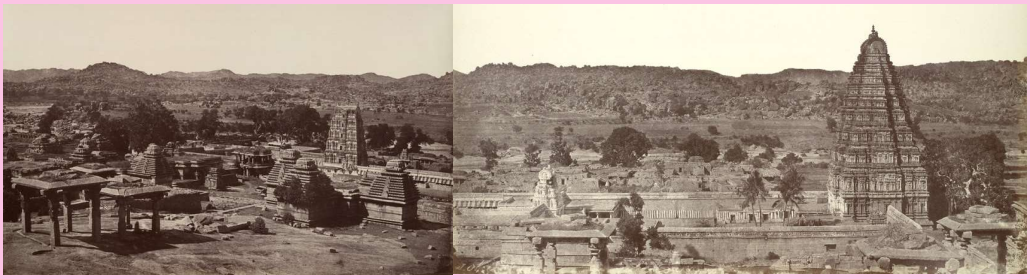
Discovery of Hampi

The ruins at Hampi were discovered in 1800 by an engineer named Colonel Colin Mackenzie. He was an employee of the English East India Company, and he prepared the first survey map of the site. Much of the information he received was based on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple. From 1856 onwards, photographers began to record the monuments and scholars began to study them. As early as 1836 epigraphists (People who study inscriptions) began collecting several inscriptions found in temples across Hampi. In an effort to discover the history of the city and the empire, historians compiled information from these sources with accounts of foreign travelers and other literature written in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit that mentioned the empire.



Right: *A painting of Colin Mackenzie with his three Indian assistants. This was painted in 1816. The suggested identities of the persons from left to right are Dhurmia, a Jain pandit holding a palm-leaf manuscript, Venkata Lechmiah, a Telugu Brahmin pandit, Colin Mackenzie in the red uniform of the East India Company and Kistnaji, a peon holding a telescope.*

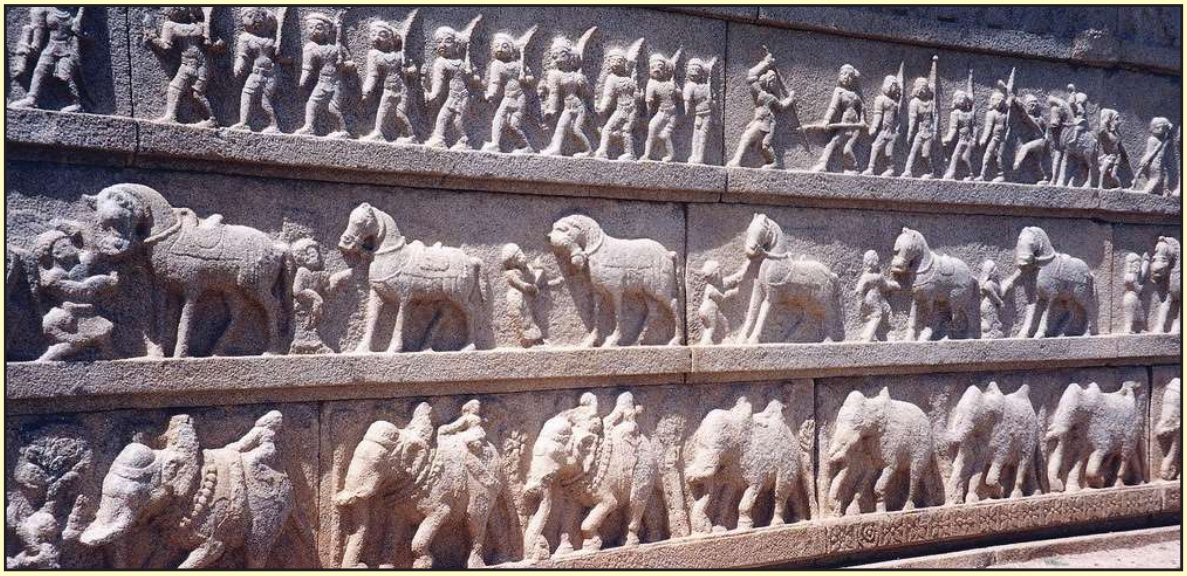
Right: *Photos taken of Hampi in 1857 by William Henry, an officer in the British Army*



Fortify - From Latin *fortis* (strong)

Trade of Weapons and Horses in Vijayanagara

As warfare during these times relied on effective cavalry, the import of horses from Arabia and Central Asia was very important to the Deccan kings. This trade was initially controlled by Arab traders. Local communities of horse merchants also participated in this trade. From 1498 the Portuguese appeared on the west coast of the subcontinent and attempted to establish trading and military stations. Their superior military technology, especially the use of muskets, enabled them to become important players in the tangled politics of the period.



Above: *Carvings from the Vittala temple in Hampi. These carvings show horse traders bringing horses from far away places to sell to the Vijayanagara empire.*

Social Evils in the Vijayanagara Empire

In keeping with the times, there were, unfortunately, several negative practices that took place under the Vijayanagara empire.

Right: *A 19th century painting by an Indian artist depicting the act of Sati.*

Some of these were as follows:

Untouchability - Discrimination against people of lower castes
Sati - Making a widow burn herself on the pyre of her deceased husband
Child Marriage - Arranging and carrying out marriages of children before they come of age.

Effective - producing a successful result (*adj.*)

5.12 Dynasties and Notable Rulers

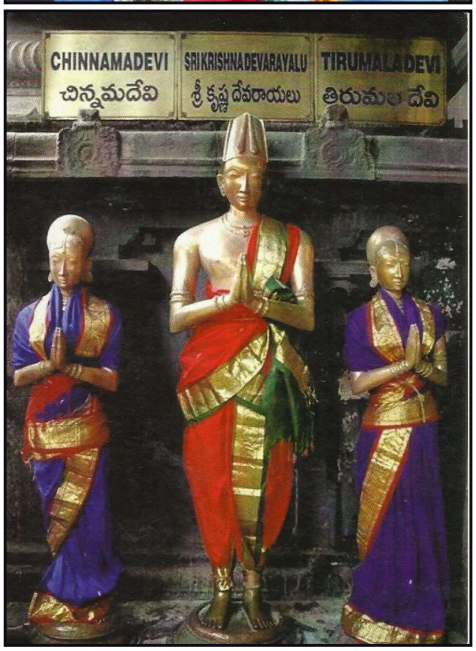
Dynasties:

The first dynasty, known as the Sangama dynasty, founded the empire and ruled till 1485. They were replaced by the Saluvas, military commanders, who remained in power till 1503 when they were replaced by the Tuluvas. Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the Tuluva dynasty. The final dynasty was the Aravidu dynasty, which came to power after the Battle of Talikota (1565).

The founder of the Aravidu dynasty was Tirumala, the brother of the Vijayanagara regent who died at Talikota. After the loss of the city of Vijayanagara, Tirumala relocated the capital to Penugonda. The Aravidu dynasty, and with it the Vijayanagara empire, came to an end in 1664.

Above: *The emblem of Vijayangara. The emblem contains a dagger, the sun, the moon, and a boar.*

Right: *A modern day painting of Krishnadeva Raya*



Right: *The bronze statues of Krishnadevaraya and his wives at the entrance to the Tirupati temple.*

Notable Rulers - Krishnadeva Raya

One of the most famous kings of the Vijayanagara empire was Krishnadeva Raya (ruled 1509-1529). He reigned over most of South India in the 16th century. His rule extended over parts of present day Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Northern Tamil Nadu.

He was a just and able statesman and a crafty general. The Tuluva dynasty was founded by Krishnadevaraya's father and Krishnadevaraya was the third ruler in this dynasty.

Krishnadevaraya was a staunch Vaishnavite and built temples in the Hoysala style of architecture. He was tolerant towards all religions and allowed no persecution on religious grounds. The remains of several mosques and jain temples have been found in the capital city, indicating the government's tolerance. He was a devotee of Lord Tirumala of Tirupati. During his reign, a statue of him with his two wives was commissioned at the entrance of the Tirupati temple.

Effective - From Latin *efficere* (accomplish)

Source Study: The Daily Routine of Krishnadeva Raya

We get valuable information about the daily routine of Krishnadevaraya from the Portuguese traveller Dominigo Paes who visited Vijayanagar between 1520-1522. The information below is a simplified excerpt from the chronicles of the travels of Dominigo Paes.

The King was an early riser. His routine was to drink and anoint himself with 3 quarter pint of gingelly oil before daybreak. Wearing only a loincloth, he would lift weights made of clay and then exercised with a sword until he sweat out all the oil.

After that he would wrestle with one of the wrestlers. After this everyday he would gallop about the plain until dawn. There, after a brahmin would bathe him, he would go into the palace to conduct the ceremonial customs.

Right: *A photo of modern day mud-wrestlers in India. This style of wrestling is also known as Pehlwani, Kushti. or Malla-Yuddha. It is common across South Asia and is still very popular in Pakistan and Northern India.*

Conquests of Krishnadeva Raya:

Krishnadeva Raya launched many successful conquests during his reign. He fought and crushed the forces of the Bahamani Sultanate in 1509. He then annexed the Raichur doab, a triangular piece of land between the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. The Raichur doab lies in modern day Karnataka and Telangana.

Krishnadeva Raya defeated several of the breakaway Deccan Sultanates that formed during the disintegration of the Bahmani Sultanate. He also defeated the powerful Gajapati emperor of Odisha and imprisoned his son. The King surrendered and made peace with Krishnadevaraya.

Relations With Portuguese:

In 1510, Krishnadevaraya established friendly relations with the Portuguese in Goa and began to buy guns and Arabian horses from the Portuguese merchants. This helped him to establish a monopoly over the trade of these items within and around the Vijayanagara empire.

Right: *An engraving from Vittala temple in Hampi depicting Portuguese merchants bringing horses to Vijayanagar to be sold. The men can be identified as such on the basis of their clothes and their distinctive hats.*

Disintegrate - to break into small parts or pieces and be destroyed (*verb*)

Contributions of Krishnadeva Raya to Literature :

Krishnadevaraya was a man of many talents and took keen interest in art, literature and architecture. He had keen interest in Telugu and Sanskrit literature and wrote several works in these languages. His most famous work is Amuktamalyada, written in Telugu. He also wrote a play in Sanskrit called Jambavati Kalyana, which tells the story of Jambavati, the only daughter of Jambavan, the bear King who had assisted Rama in his war against Ravan.

Amuktamalyada is an epic poem in Telugu written by Krishnadevaraya. Amuktamalyada literally means "one who has offered a garland to God after wearing it". Considered as a masterpiece, Amuktamalyada describes the story of the wedding of the Hindu Lord Vishnu and Andal.

In the introduction of the book, Krishnadeva Raya reveals that one day Lord Vishnu appeared in his dreams and instructed him to write the story of his wedding with Andal at Srirangam in Telegu. According to Krishnadeva Raya, Lord Vishnu also gave him the reason why he should write in Telegu.

> If you ask me why in Telegu,
> You are the Telegu ruler of a Telegu land,
> All the Kings serving under you being Telugu,
> You shall know that Telugu is the greatest of all the languages here.
> - A simplified excerpt from a translation of the Amuktamalyada

He also encouraged women to take up writing. A famous work from this time period by a woman is Madhurvijayam, written by Ganga Devi, which describes the Vijayanagara empire's conquest of the Madhurai sultanate.

Above: *A modern cover of Amuktamalayada. The book is still being published till this day and is available online, both in its original Telegu form as well as in English.*

Right: *An engraving outside the Virupaksha temple in Hampi bearing the name Krishnadeva Raya as well as a depiction of Nandi. The King's name is still visible and legible in Kannada. The name has been highlighted in the picture to the right. The stone contains a much longer inscription underneath, also written in the Kannada script.*

Disintegrate - From Latin *dis* (to do the opposite of) + *integrare* (to make whole)

5.13 Battle of Talikota (1565 CE) and Decline

In the decades following the death of Krishnadeva Raya, the Vijayanagar empire weakened. The battle of Talikota was a decisive battle in the history of the Vijayanagara empire. The battle was fought over an area of 40 square kilometers near Talikota.

Ramaraya, the son in law of Krishnadeva Raya, was the leader of the Vijayanagara troops. On the opposite side was the coalition army of the Deccan Sultans. This grand army comprised the Sultanates of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Golkonda and Bidar. In the course of the battle Ramaraya was killed and the Vijayanagara army was defeated.

Upon hearing of the news of Rama Raya's death, his brother Tirumala feld from the battle field. He and his men gathered the treasures and gold that they could from the capital city, and traveled to the city of Penukonda which became the new capital. Tirumala's heirs would continue the Vijayanagara empire under the Aravidu dynasty, but it would never again reach the heights of power or influence that it had known under previous rulers.

Above: *A painting from the manuscript of Ta'rif-i Husain Shahi (Chronicle of Husain Shah) depicting Hussain Nizam Shah I (riding a horse) ordering the decapitation of Ramaraya (reigned 1542-65), the defeated ruler of Vijayanagara.*

Effects of the Battle of Talikota:

- The Vijayanagara empire lost its glory. The successful armies of the Deccan Sultans looted the city of Vijayanagara for many months.
- The Portuguese were restricted to Goa without the support of Vijayanagara. It was a setback to their trade.
- Donations to religious centers likeTirupati stopped.
- Many territories of the Vijayanagara empire became independent and broke away. This led to the disintegration of Vijayanagara empire
- It began a final Muslim penetration of southern India that lasted until the end of the 18th century.

Accomplishments of Krishnadeva Raya:

- He ruled for twenty years - this long reign allowed him to consolidate his power and make the empire far more powerful.
- He won many military victories
- He occupied the Raichur Doab. He conquered this land by defeating the Bijapur Sultanate (one of the break-away Sultanates formed after the disintegration of the Bahmani Sultanate)
- He established friendly relations with the Portuguese
- He built many dams, reservoirs, and canals to help with irrigation. This helped to improve agriculture in his empire.
- He wrote a book in Telugu and a play in Sanskrit
- He conquered the territory of the King of Orissa Prataparudra Deva (The Gajapati Emperor)

Vacuum - (in this context) a situation in which somebody/something is missing (*noun*)

Case Study - Afanasy Nikitin

Afanasy Nikitin visitd the Bahmani Empire - this lay to the North of the Vijayanagara Empire. His account of his travels provides us with an interesting insight into life in South India at the time

5.23 Primary Sources - Afanasy Nikitin

Afanasy Nikitin was a Russian traveler who visited the territories of the Bahmani Empire in the late 1400's. His writings provide us with an interesting insight into the affairs of the empire and its people at the time. Unlike the court-appointed historians, Nikitin makes no attempt to whitewash the regime or to glorify its rulers. His writings provide us with an complete and balanced view of the Bahmani empire - with all its strengths and flaws.

Source Study - A Voyage Beyond Three Seas - The life and travels of Afanasy Nikitin

In Tver, a picturesque and historic town near the Volga river in Russia, an adventurous merchant decided to set sail down the water and cross the Caspian Sea to Persia. This merchant was a deeply religious man by the name of Afanasy Nikitin. His journey, starting in 1466, is now called the "Voyage Beyond Three Seas". It took him to Azerbaijan and to Persia, before leading him finally to India, a country he became fascinated with.

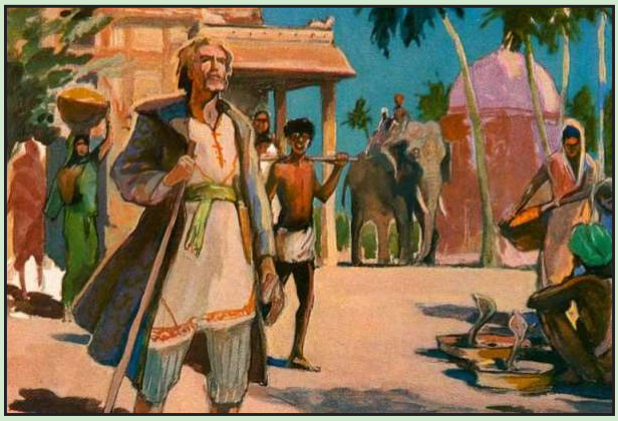
It was in Hormuz (Iran) that Nikitin first began to hear about the riches of India and the products it offered that were not available in his own country. On finding out that horses were not bred in India at that time, he took a horse and set sail on a small ship, for western India in 1469.

Above: *A statue of Afanasy Nikitin in the city of Tver, Russia.*

Whitewash - to attempt to hide unpleasant facts about somebody/something (*verb*)

In his notes, Nikitin mentions that his ship arrived near Diu. "From Dega we sailed to Gujarat and finally to Chaul (a town in Maharashtra). He noted that he was an item of curiosity in Chaul, and where he went, people followed him around.

He almost immediately came in contact with the local rulers in Chaul, commenting on their appearance: "And their prince wears a dhoti upon his head and another about his loins; their boyars (aristocrats) wear a dhoti round their shoulders and another about their loins; their princesses wrap a dhoti round their shoulders and another round their loins.



Above: *An modern artistic depiction of Afanasy Nikitin in Chaul*

Rural Life

The Russian was so riveted by life in India that he keenly observed and wrote about the day-to-day occurrences. "Throughout four months there was water and mud everywhere, both by day and at night. That is the season of ploughing and sowing wheat and rice and pulse, and all the other foods." He also seemed to take an interest in local alcohol: "Wine is made in big coconuts, and beer is brewed from fruit."

A 1956 film jointly directed by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and Vasili Pronin, titled Pardesi in Hindi, showed Nikitin (played by Oleg Strizhenov) falling in love with an Indian woman named Champa (Nargis). Nothing in the merchant's notes indicated that he was in a relationship when in India. He did, however, write frequently about Indian women in his notes: "In India strangers put up at inns, and the food is cooked for them by women, who also make the guests' beds."

Above: *A still from the Hindi movie Pardesi (1956). The man depicted is Afanasy Nikitin, played by the Russian actor Oleg Strizhenov.*

Wanting to sell his stallion in India, Nikitin observed that what he heard about horses in the country was true. "No horses are bred in India, but oxen and buffaloes are," he wrote. "They are used for carrying persons and sometimes goods. They serve all purposes."

Horses were indeed a prized commodity in the country and the Russian noted how they were fed pulse and khichdi, made with sugar and ghee, as well as rice cakes. Unfortunately, the ruler of Junnar (a region to the north of modern-day Pune) took away his stallion and offered to return it under one condition. "When he learnt that I was a Russian and not a Muslim, he said: 'I shall give thee back they stallion and pay thee a thousand pieces of gold, if only thou wilt adopt the Mohammedan faith, (if not) I shall keep the stallion and exact a ransom of a thousand pieces of gold from thee.'"

He was given four days to make up his mind. Luckily for him, his friend, the ruler of Khorassan (a region in Iran) rode into Junnar before the ultimatum expired and Nikitin asked him for help. The Khan of Khorassan managed to convince the ruler of Junnar not to convert Nikitin and got him to return the stallion. Nikitin seemed traumatized by the episode and wrote, "And so, my Christian brothers of Rus, those of you who want to go to the land of India must leave their faith in Rus and invoke Mohammed before setting out for the land of Hindustan."

Whitewash - First recorded use was in England in 1591. It was a cheap white paint

Hindu Pilgrimage to Srisailam

Nikitin managed to befriend some Hindus in Bidar and he said they treated him well when they found out that he was not a Muslim. "They did not hide from me when eating, trading or praying, nor did they conceal their wives." He wrote that there were 84 different faiths in India. "People of different faiths do not eat or drink together, nor do they intermarry; some eat mutton, fowl, fish and eggs.

After spending four months in Bidar, Nikitin went with his new Hindu friends on a pilgrimage to Parvat (Srisailam), a group of temples by the Krishna River, around 215 kilometers to the south-east of Hyderabad. He compared the pilgrimage spot to Mecca and Jerusalem.

"It took us a month to reach the butkhanah". The word that Niktin uses, "butkhanah" means temple complex. It is an Urdu word of Persian origin and has a literal meaning of idol/statue-house. Nikitin wrote. "The market by the butkhanah lasts for five days. And the butkhanah is very large – half the size of Tver – and is built of stone, in which the deeds of the deity are carved; in all there are 12 carvings that show the God working wonders, or appearing before Indians in many shapes; first, in the shape of a man, second, of a man with an elephant's trunk; third, of an ape-like man; fourth of a man having the form of a ferocious beast."

He noted that crowds of up to 100,000 came from all over India to the pilgrimage spot. What he saw in the temple complex impressed him. "In the butkhanah there is a God with the face of an ape, but it is carved in stone, and is very big indeed, his tail is slung over his shoulder, and his right arm is raised high and stretched out like Emperor Justinian's in Constantinople, while in his left hand he holds a spear; his loins are wrapped in a cloth; his face is that of an ape." This was the first Russian description of a Hanuman idol.

The merchant paid close attention to Hindu prayer rituals. "And they pray facing eastwards, in the Russian manner; they raise high both hands and put them on the head, and lie face downwards on the ground and stretch out on it – that is how they worship," Nikitin wrote

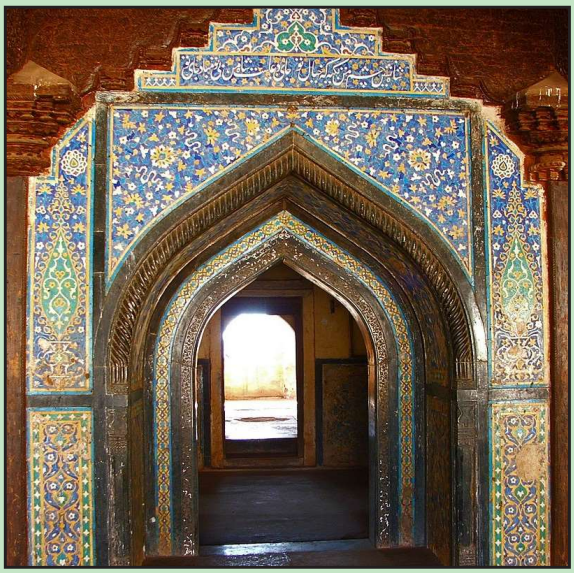
Above: *A photograph of one of the temple complexes in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh. This is the same pilgrimage town that Afanasy Nikitin visited during his travels in India. Many of the temples and idols in Srisailam are hundreds of years old - meaning that it is very likely these are the same ones that Nikitin saw during his pilgrimage.*

Fretwork - patterns cut into wood, metal, etc. to decorate it (*noun*)

Observations of Bidar

Nikitin traveled south from Junnar and wrote about Bidar and Gulbarga. "At Bidar, horses and various goods are sold: brocade, silk, and all kinds of other goods: slaves from Africa too, are on sale there," he wrote.

The merchant was welcomed to the Bidar ruler's palace, where he seemed impressed with the architecture. "The Sultan's palace has seven gates, with a hundred guards and a hundred kaffir scribes at each gate; some of them register those coming in and others, those going out; but strangers are barred from the palace," he wrote. "And the palace is very beautiful, with fretwork and gilt all over it, and its every stone is very beautifully painted in gold, and inside the palace, there are many vessels." Nikitin noted that a thousand men guarded Bidar by night and that the city's streets had 14-foot-long snakes.



Above: *A photograph of Bidar fort, described by Afanasy Nikitin.*
Left: *A photograph of the paintings and artwork decorating the inside of the palace. The photograph is of the interior of the Rangeen Mahal, a structure within the boundaries of the Bidar fort.*

In his writings, the merchant describes what he heard about places he did not visit, such as Sri Lanka, writing about its monkeys, rubies and crystals. He also mentioned the pepper, nutmeg, clove, areca nuts and dyes of Calicut, as well as the indigo from Gujarat. His notes became the most important source of information about India in Russia at that time.

Nikitin spent close to three years in India, but was eager to return home. His notes indicated a great degree of homesickness. He wrote, "May God protect the Russian land! There is no land in the world like it, although the boyars in the Russian land are unjust. May the Russian land be well-ordered, and may there be justice there." In 1472, he finally left India, but died before he reached Russia.

This article was written by Ajay Kamalakaran, an independent journalist based in Mumbai.

Left: *A special commemorative envelope cover released by the government in New Delhi on 11-October-2021 to celebrate the 550th anniversary of Afanasy Nikitin's visit to India*
Below: *A 1997 commemorative coin of released by the Bank of Russia showing Afanasy Nikitin embarking on his journey from Tver.*

Fretwork - From Old French *frete* (interlaced work). Originally of Germanic